United Nations

Press Release

Department of Public Information • News Coverage Service • New York

Prepared by Central News

DH/955
16 August 1991

FRIDAY HIGHLIGHTS

- United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and South Africa sign landmark agreement on voluntary repatriation of 40,000 South African refugees and political exiles.

- Need to continue and strengthen oil embargo against South Africa reaffirmed at hearing of Intergovernmental Monitoring Group.

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A landmark agreement on the voluntary repatriation of South African refugees and political exiles was signed today by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the Republic of South Africa. The agreement, which formally establishes the first United Nations presence in South Africa, came after sixteen months of negotiations.

The main points of the agreement include a comprehensive amnesty for all political offences, the establishment of an adequate and effective UNHCR presence in South Africa and complete freedom of movement for returnees in South Africa.

The United Nations High Commissioner, Sadako Ogata, said the agreement marked the "beginning of the end of a 30-year-old human tragedy".

UNHCR expects to establish a presence in South Africa within 10 to 15 days. An estimated 40,000 South African refugees are currently living in dozens of countries worldwide, some of them for more than 30 years. Initial costs estimates for their return range from $35 million to $40 million.

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The need to continue and strengthen the oil embargo against South Africa was affirmed yesterday at a hearing organized by the Intergovernmental Group concerned with monitoring the supply of oil and petroleum products to South Africa.

(more)

For information media—not an official record

In an opening statement, the Chairman, Anthony B. Nyaki (United Republic of Tanzania), said that despite recent suggested reforms in Pretoria, the system of apartheid still remained firmly in place. He felt the group should consider ways to render the oil embargo more effective and the conditions under which it could be lifted.

Ibrahim A. Gambari (Nigeria), Chairman of the Special Committee against Apartheid, and Godwin Mutale S. Mfula (Zambia), representative of the Chairman of the Front-line States, both addressed the problems of the premature lifting of sanctions by the European Economic Community (EEC) and the United States.

A series of experts testified on the lack of progress towards ending apartheid. Particular emphasis was placed on the lack of negotiations on a constitution to create a non-racial democracy. The unchanged policy towards exiles, the holding of political prisoners and the continuing violence were also cited as evidence of Pretoria's unwillingness to institute a process of irreversible change.

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